THE INDIAN MUTINY OF 1857
AND
THE SIKHS

By
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GURDWARA PARBANDHAK COMMITTEE
SISGANJ, CHANDNI CHOWK
DELHI

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INTRODUCTORY

The first part of the this paper on *the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Sikhs* was written for the Indian Freedom Struggle Centenary (1857-1957) Souvenir Committee, New Delhi, and was published in the *Tribune*, Ambala, on August 15, 1957. I had been asked by the Secretary to the Committee in his letter No. AL/722 of June 13, 1957, to rebut, if I could, the charge that "Indian Struggle for freedom (1857) failed as the Sikhs betrayed and sided with the British".

The Indian people had for some time past been fed on the writings of the self-glorifying political propagandists, calling this uprising the First War of Indian Independence. And they were taken aback by the truthful statements contained in this paper. To them objective history was not palatable enough, nor was it easy for them to digest. The result was a number of letters that appeared in the *Tribune* during August and September 1957. Some of them raised points which, I felt, needed clarification for those who had not studied the subject from first-hand sources and had depended for their knowledge on non-historical literature. For them was written the second part of the paper which was published in the same journal on October 6, 1957.

It is a great pity that in a spirit of misguided patriotism our countrymen—even the educated ones—are not unoften carried away by self-glorifying emotions, against which the venerable Acharya Kriplani cautioned them at the State History Congress at Bhopal in January 1968, with particular reference to the "Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, which has been glorified into the First War of Indian Independence. According to him it was nothing but an attempt by the old order to get back their kingdoms and principalities". And it is a lamentable fact "that the motives of some of the principal actors [in the drama of Mutiny] were not free from suspicion". "But historical research and writing in India", to quote the editor of the *Tribune*, from his editorial of January 16, 1968, "has seldom been able to surmount what it falsely regards to be its patriotic duty even at the cost of objective scholarship". The late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, one of the leading most fighters for the freedom of India in the twentieth century, writes in his *foreword* to *Eighteen Fifty-seven* by Dr. Surendra Nath Sen, published by the Publication Division of the Government of India :

> "Some Indians have written on the struggle in the early years of the century. If truth is to be told, we have to admit that the books they have written are not history but mere political propaganda. These authors wanted to represent the uprising as a planned war of

> independence organized by the nobility of India against British Government". [p. viii]

But the conception of India as a whole as one unified country and of its people as one solid nation, for whose independence they could combine together and fight to the last, was yet in embryo in 1857, and was not familiar to the Indian mind. It was, in fact, propounded by the sponsors and leaders of the Indian National Congress some three decades later when a beginning came to be made for the emotional integration of the people under its banner.

Dr. Romesh C. Majumdar, the author of the *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, volume I, tells us on the basis of his life-long researches in the history of the country that :

> "I thought it necessary... to counteract the current view that the outbreak of 1857 was the first national war of independence. I have tried to show, with the help of details given, that it was neither 'first', nor 'National' nor 'a war of independence." [*Preface*, xvii, 258. Cf. *The Tribune*, January 31, 1968]

The Mutiny failed, as described in the following pages, not because the Sikhs, or the people of the Panjab, or of any other province, kept themselves aloof from it or sided with the British, but because there was no patriotic and national sentiment, either among its prompters or soldiers, to

back it, and also because there were no selfless leaders, no general plan and no central organisation to guide it, nor was there any unity of command and competent generalship to direct its military operations and to watch and arrest the augmentation and successful progress of the British Indian army.

The paper places before its readers a number of historical facts based on the researches of India's leading historians of international fame and unimpeachable integrity, and their impartial verdict is that it would be a travesty of truth to describe the revolt of 1857 as a national war of independence.

Patiala,
October 21, 1968. GANDA SINGH

THE INDIAN MUTINY OF 1857 AND THE SIKHS

PART I

UNDESERVED PRAISE

The Mutiny at Meerut on May 10, 1857, which later became widespread and developed into a revolt in some parts of the U.P. and neighbouring territories, has been called by some writers 'the Indian War of Independence'. This view, however, has not been accepted by the most recent researches of the well-known Indian historians of international fame. The full-throated praise showered by some of our modern political leaders on the sepoy mutineers and their so-called leaders have all been undeserved. And equally, if not more, undeserved have been the censures and charges of betrayal and treachery levelled against those who did not espouse their cause, or were opposed to their activities. The worst sufferers in the latter case have been the people of the Punjab, particularly the Sikhs. This is because of the intensive propaganda of some politicians who do not appear to care much for historical truth.

FALSE ALLEGATIONS

Some people say that the 'Indian Struggle for Freedom (1857) failed because the Sikhs betrayed their comrades and sided with the British'. The

charge of 'betrayal' against the Sikhs could be justified only if they 'had given up', or 'had been disloyal to, or had violated allegiance to' a cause, person or trust they had at any time befriended or owned. As history knows, the Sikhs were never at any time privy to, or took up the cause of, the mutiny of 1857. They had never been taken into confidence. They had neither been consulted nor invited. The Poorbia sepoys, as the soldiers of the Bengal army were then, and are still, called in the Punjab, had not the moral courage to approach the Sikhs for co-operation and assistance against the British as they had themselves helped the British destroy the independent kingdom of the Punjab in 1845-46 and reduce it to British subjection in 1848-49. As such, there was not much love lost between the Poorbia sepoys and the people of the Punjab. The offensive airs of the Poorbia garrison in the Punjab had been particularly galling to the martial Sikhs. Their behaviour towards the civil population during their first march in 1846 from the theatre of war to the capital of Lahore, and during the British occupation of the country before and after the annexation, had caused such deep wounds in the heart of the people as could not be healed in so short a period.

NOTHING NATIONAL ABOUT MUTINY

The Sikhs could not volunteer to help these erstwhile enemies of the Punjab, nor could they, for obvious reasons, espouse the cause of the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah II, whom the mutineers

had raised to the throne. For over two centuries, the Sikhs had fought against the Mughal tyranny, and they could not now be pursuaded to support an alliance which might have resulted in its re-establishment. Moreover, as the mutiny later turned out to be, there appeared to be nothing national or patriotic in it to appeal to the noble sentiments of the Sikhs to attract them to the side of the mutineers.

The wrath of the mutineers was mostly directed agaist the Christians, who had interfered with their religion. A large number of unsuspecting Englishmen and their women and children were indiscriminately murdered in Meerut, Delhi, and other places. The first man to be killed in Delhi was an Indian Christian, Dr. Chamanlal, who was standing in front of his dispensary. Their next victims were banias and Mahajans, whose shops they plundered, and account books and debt-bonds they burnt and destroyed. Beyond this, there was no planned or organized scheme or effort on their part either to subvert the rule of the East India Company, or to weaken the administrative hold of the British over the country.

Moreover, the mutiny was exclusively confined to the Poorbia sepoys of the Bengal army.

Territorially, too, it was limited to the U.P. and its neighbourhood, while the remaining 80% of India was practically unaffected by it. Even in the U.P., there were a number of pockets which

remained undisturbed. The reason for this lack of interest in, and sympathy with, and, in many cases, active opposition to, the continuance and progress of the sepoy mutiny, was the absence of any common cause, any planned scheme, any unity of interests.

The early activities of the sepoys in Delhi and its neighbourhood were repugnant not only to the civil population of the country but also to the non-Poorbia, soldiers the Rajputs, the Marathas, the Madrasis, the Garhwalis, the Gorkhas, the Dogras, the Punjabi Muslims, the Sikhs and the Pathans who could not associate themselves with the murderers of innocent women and children and the despoilers of their own countrymen.

RELIGIOUS RIOT

The mutiny at best was a religious riot of the Hindu and Muslim soldiers of the U.P. against the indiscreet but, perhaps, unintentioned callousness of some British military officers, who happened to be careless about the religious sentiments of Hindus and Muslims, offended by greased cartridges. With passions inflamed, and a number of murders committed in Meerut and Delhi, the sepoys could not retrace their steps. They were then joined by a large number of hooligans set free from jails, and of professional dacoits and plunderers from the criminal tribes of the neighbouring areas.

BAHADUR SHAH A PUPPET KING

It is true that the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, had been proclaimed king, in whose name they

professed to have risen in defence of Hinduism and Islam. But in practice, this was nothing more than a mere pretence to seek a cover for their crimes and misdeeds. His authority, they openly flouted, and his orders, they publicly disobeyed. They insulted him to his very face and treated him insolently in his own palace. Such behaviour as this was certainly not becoming of the faithful and devoted soldiers towards the king whom they had themselves raised to the throne. But, in truth, they had done so only to use him as a handy tool. If he were not to be useful to them, they had no hesitation in renouncing him. 'The sepoys at Delhi refused to fight unless they were paid their salaries, and that on an adequate scale—a demand which is hardly in consonance with the spirit which should guide a fighter in a war of independence' [RCM, 233].

The king himself was only a victim of circumstances. He had no hand either in organizing or encouraging the mutiny. He might have been glad within his heart to see the English humbled, but he was too old to plan or lead an insurrection. In fact, he had no knowledge of the rising of the sepoys till they had actually arrived at the palace gates and called upon him to assume command. He pleaded infirmity and poverty, but the sepoys would hear nothing of the sort. He was in a dilemma. He sent a fast camel rider to Agra to inform the Lieutenant-Governor of the mutiny in Meerut and of the arrival of the mutineers in Delhi.

TREACHEROUS AND UNRELIABLE MUTINEERS

Finding himself helpless before the increasing violence of the armed sepoys, violating the sanctity of the palace itself, the old king quailed before them. In fear, he issued the proclamations desired by the sepoys and outwardly espoused their cause. Within a week, the indisciplined sepoys disregarded the king's authority and refused to be commanded by his nominee, Bakht Khan, and transferred their allegiance to Prince Abu Bakr whom, on May 17, they elected as their king in place of the old emperor. The king's confidant, Ahsanulla, then complained that 'the mutineers were a treacherous, blood-thirsty class on whom no dependence could be placed'.

BAHADUR SHAH AND HIS FAMILY SEEK TO ASSIST THE BRITISH

The king himself had no faith in the sepoys or in the success of the mutiny. He, therefore, entered into secret negotiations with the British and offered to have the gates of the fort and the city of Delhi opened to them if they guaranteed his life, pension, and privileges. These negotiations came to nothing, it is true, but they 'show Bahadur Shah in the true colour so far as his attitude to the mutiny or the War of Independence is concerned' [RCM, 123].

The principal queen, Zinat Mahal, on her own part, offered to assist the British if her son, Jawan Bakht, was recognised as successor to the old emperor to the exclusion of other princes. The

Mughal princes, too, were not sincere and faithful to the mutineers. They, as well, offered their services to the British in the occupation of Delhi on condition of favour being shown to them [SNS, 95-96]. 'During the brief term of their authority', the princes 'occupied themselves in feathering their nests', with the loot of the city, and then 'their only anxiety was to save their skin as best they could' [SNS, 109]. All this leaves no doubt, 'that Bahadur Shah and his family betrayed the cause not only of the mutineers, of whom he was the nominal head, but also of the whole country' [RCM, 124].

DOUBLE ROLE OF THE RULING CHIEFS

Raja Nahar Singh of Ballabhgarh, Nawab Abdur Rahman Khan of Jhajjar and Rao Tula Ram of Rewari, who were supposed to have identified themselves with the king and the mutineers, were playing a double game and negotiating with the British for a settlement. Their double dealings, however, did not succeed with the British who treated them as other mutineers and hanged them [SNS, 91, 111].

SELFISH MOTIVES OF LEADERS OF MUTINY

About the other prominent leaders of the sepoys, the less said the better. In the words of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, supported by the evidence adduced in recent researches in mutiny records, 'with a few honourable exceptions—of

whom the most distinguished were Ahmadullah and Tantya Tope — most of the leaders who took part in the struggle did so for personal reasons. They did not rise against the British till their personal interests had been damaged. Even after the revolt had begun, Nana Sahib declared that if Dalhousie's decisions were reversed and his own demands met, he would be willing to come to terms.

RANI OF JHANSI A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES

The Rani of Jhansi had her own grievances [SNS, XV]. There is nothing on record to say that she had any hand in planning, instigating or organizing the mutiny of sepoys at Jhansi. In fact she informed the British that she had been ill-treated by the mutineers and forced to pay money, and she asked for their help to maintain order. Believing in her innocence, the Commissioner of Saugor division nominated her to rule in Jhansi till the British could re-establish their administration. When the British changed their attitude and suspected her of complicity in the mutiny, she sent pathetic appeals to the authorities pleading her innocence and professing her loyalty to the British. If she had succeeded in dispelling the suspicions of the British, she would have gone to their side. But when, at last, she found that the British held her responsible for the mutiny and massacre at Jhansi, she preferred to fight. And it may be said to her credit and glory that she died heroically in the battlefield [RCM, 155].

TANTYA TOPE A FUGITIVE

Tantya Tope was neither an organizer nor a leader of the mutineers, but only a follower of Nana Sahib, to whom he was devotedly attached. But luck did not favour him. He was driven from place to place and could not find even a single Maratha village across the Narbada to give him shelter. He had, therefore, to fly to the forests where he was betrayed to the British by a professed rebel friend, Raja Man Singh of Narwar, a feudatory of Sindhia.

HINDU-MUSLIM CONFLICT

The mutiny having broken out all of a sudden, and nobody having an idea of the turn it would take, there was no understanding between the Hindus and Muslims. Whereas, in the chaos and confusion that followed the arrival of the Meerut sepoys at Delhi, a number of Muslims were oppressed and their homes plundered, a regular *jehad* was proclaimed against the Hindus by Muslims in a number of places. Some clever adventurers found in the mutiny an opportunity for the revival of an Islamic kingdom and used the cover of religion for their anti-Hindu activities. The green flag of holy war was not unoften displayed in Delhi. It was hoisted in Bareilly, Bijnor, Moradabad and many other places where the Hindus were plundered and massacred. This estranged the feelings between the Hindus and Muslims. As fellow-sufferers, the Hindus in many places took the side

of the English, protected their lives and property and prayed for their victory. "It was generally held," says Dr. Sen, "that as the Hindus were as a community well disposed towards the British and the Muslims as a community were hostile, the Hindus should be exempted from any penalty. Some Hindus of the trading classes were allowed to return [to the city of Delhi]...It was ultimately realized that disaffection towards the British government was not the monopoly of any particular community, and there were exceptions in both...It was, therefore, decided that every citizen who desired to return should pay a fine, but there should be a discrimination in the rate on a communal basis. Whereas the Muslim had to pay a fine equivalent to 25 per cent of the value of his real property, the Hindu was required to pay 15 per cent less."

RIVAL FACTIONS

A close and critical study of the mutiny records reveals a very sad story of 'everyone for himself and no one for the country'. The Mughal Emperor, the proclaimed head of the mutiny, the Queen and the Princes, and other leaders of the revolt all pulled in their own directions and played a double game to secure their ends and interests. The sepoys of Oudh fought for the restoration of their own king. Nana Sahib and the Rani of Jhansi pressed their own claims. A number of smaller adventurers, not inspired by any patriotic impulse, sprang up to exploit the opportunity offered

by the mutiny. Khan Bahadur Khan, a grandson of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, set himself up as Viceroy or Naib Nazim of Rohilkhand. The Banjaras of Saharanpur set up a king of their own. The Gujjars had different rajas in different areas, Fatua being proclaimed as the king of the Gujjars. One Devi Singh proclaimed himself king of fourteen villages in the Mathura district. Similarly one Mahimaji Wadi, a dacoit, and Belsare, a Maratha Brahman, were attracted to the rebel camp to improve their fortunes.

MUTINEERS IN FACT ANTI-NATIONALISTS

The idea of Indian nationalism and of fighting for the independence of India was a thing unknown both to the so-called leaders of the mutiny and to the Poorbia sepoys who had been instrumental during the past hundred years in the destruction of the independence of the various Indian independent kingdoms. The Marathas, the Mysorians, the Malabaris, the Rajputs, the Gurkhas, the Pathans, the Sikhs and the Assamese had all been reduced to dust with their help, and never had the Poorbias raised their little finger in protest, much less in their defence. This was not a very creditable record for attracting the non-Poorbias to their side.

The people of the Punjab were the worst and the most recent sufferers at their hands. In addition to the Poorbia sepoys who fought against them under the British in 1845-46 and 1848-49, it was the Poorbia soldiers of fortune, Tej Singh and Lal

Singh, the Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister of the Punjab, who had entered into secret agreements with the British and had betrayed the Sikhs in the first Anglo-Sikh War. Again, it was mostly with the help of the Poorbia regiments and Poorbia civilian subordinate officials that the Punjab was being held under British subjection in 1857 when the mutiny took place. As such, the people of the Punjab, particularly the Sikhs, could not have looked upon them as worthy of their support in a cause which threatened them with the re-establishment of Mughal tyranny of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

SIKHS THE LAST DEFENDERS OF INDIAN LIBERTY

The Sikhs, says Dr. Majumdar, 'were the last defenders of the liberty of India'. But 'the sepoys [Poorbias]...had not the least scruple to fight the Sikhs'. 'We have not the least evidence to show that the Indian leaders like Nana Sahib and others raised their little finger to help the cause of the Sikhs'. 'It is difficult to resist the conclusion', he continues, 'that the attitude and activities of the sepoys in 1849 certainly did not correspond to the patriotic fervour with which they are supposed to be endowed in 1857'. [RCM, 233-34].

CONDUCT OF MUTINEERS

Moreover, the conduct of the mutineers and their leaders in Meerut, Delhi and other places was not such as to give others the impression of the insurrection being anything like national or of

common interest and benefit to the people of the country at large. The discriminate massacres of Indian Christians on the basis of their religion and of unsuspecting Englishmen, and their innocent women and children, were the worst type of blood-thirstiness that sent throughout the country a thrill of horror and hatred against the mutineers and alienated the sympathies of their prospective friends. And when Bahadur Shah wrote to Indian princes on behalf of the mutineers, nobody took any serious notice of his letters, and some of them resolutely refused to identify themselves with the unscrupulous rebels.

INDIAN ARMY STOOD ALOOF

Although the movement had begun as a military mutiny of the Bengal Army, that army itself did not as a whole join it, but a large section of it actively fought on the side of the government to suppress it. The Madras and Bombay armies took no part in it. The mutiny could not, as such, be called a general mutiny of the Indian Army.

HISTORICAL MISINTERPRETATION

With the sepoys not having the overthrow of the East India Company's rule as their objective, leaders being positively selfish and treacherous playing a double game, it is a cruel misinterpretation of history to call it a war of Indian Independence. And it would be the height of injustice to accuse for its failure those who happened not to join this aimless, planless and leaderless uprising.

The Punjabis were not alone in not joining the revolt. They could not have joined it for reasons that have been stated above at some length. The Bengalis, the Marathas, the Madrasis and the Malabaris, whose love for the independence of India has been in no way less than that of anyone else in the country, took no part in it. The Rajputs, the Jats, the Dogras and the Garhwalis kept studiedly aloof. The educated communities of Bengal and Madras openly condemned the rising and denounced the mutiny and the mutineers [SNS, 407-08].

The co-operation of the Sikhs with the mutineers could not have made much difference, nor could it have contributed much to their success. There were the Punjabi Musalmans, the Bahawalpuri Daudpotras, the Baluchis, and the Frontier Pathans who were deadly opposed to the mutineers.

The strength of the East India Company's rule in India depended mostly on the naval power of England. The rising in the Punjab could not have placed any obstacles in the way of their reinforcements from the West. A few more murders of Englishmen in the Punjab or even in a military defeat of the British in that province could not have ended the rule of the Company in India and freed her from the British yoke.

NOTED HISTORIAN'S VERDICT

'The Sepoy Mutiny was not a fight for freedom,' says Sir Jadunath Sarkar. 'It was not a

rising of the people for political self-determination, but a conspiracy of mercenary soldiers (only of the North Indian army) to prevent the cunning destruction of their religion by defiling their bodies with pig's lard and cow's fat which were used in lubricating the paper parcels of catridges...

> 'A number of dispossessed dynasts, both Hindu and Muslim, exploited the well-founded caste-suspicions of the sepoys and made these simple folk their cat's-paw in a gamble for recovering their thrones. The last scions of the Delhi Mughals or the Oudh Nawabs and the Peshwa, can by no ingenuity be called fighters for Indian freedom' [*Hindusthan Standard,* Puja Annual, 1956, p. 22].

NO NOBLE SENTIMENT

The mutiny of 1857 failed not because the Sikhs, or the people of the Punjab, or of any other state or province, did not join it, but because it had no noble sentiment behind it, no plan to guide it and no sincere leader to see it through. 'The failure of the outbreak,' according to Dr. Majumdar, 'may also be attributed to the fact that neither the leaders, nor the sepoys and masses were inspired by any high ideal. The lofty sentiments of patriotism and nationalism, with which they are credited, did not appear to have any basis in fact. As a matter of fact, such ideas were not yet familiar to Indian minds.' 'In the light of the available evidence, we

are forced to the conclusion,' says Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, 'that the uprising of 1857 was not the result of careful planning, nor were there any masterminds behind it' [SNS, x]. 'As I read about the events of 1857, I am forced to the conclusion,' he continues, 'that the Indian national character had sunk very low. The leaders of the revolt could never agree. They were mutually jealous and continually intrigued against one another...In fact these personal jealousies and intrigues were largely responsible for the Indian defeat' *[Ibid.* XV*]*.

PART II

CONTROVERSIAL POINTS CLEARED

HISTORY takes no cognizance of the sentiments of people coming a century after the event, twisting and moulding it, mixing politics with history, to give it the colour and appearance which never belonged to it.

My conclusions are based on facts which have not so for been controverted by anyone. They are not only my conclusions. They are also the conclusions of the greatest living authorities on the history of India—Dr. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Dr. Romesh C. Mazumdar and Dr. Surendranath Sen. They are scholars of international fame and are acknowledged as the leading educationists of India. They have been the Vice-Chancellors of the universities of Calcutta, Dacca and Delhi. Their conclusions have not only been accepted but also supported by the late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Education Minister of the Government of India, and other men of sound learning and judgment.

One of my critics thinks that I have 'derisively' referred to the soldiers of the Bengal Army as 'Poorbia'. Not at all. If he were to refer

to contemporary records of the Central and provincial governments and to the regimental histories of the then Bengal Army, he would find the words 'Poorbia' and 'Hindoostanee' then commonly used for men from beyond the Jamuna. [See MacMunn's *The Armies of India*, the *Punjab Mutiny Reports*, and *Regimental History of the 54th Sikhs*]. And in the Punjab, the word 'Poorbia' was more commonly used than 'Hindoostanee', as it continues to the present day, and there is no derision attached to it.

MURDER PLOT

According to regimental records, there was only one Sikh Regiment at Dehra Ismail Khan when the Mutiny broke out at Meerut on May 10, 1857, and that was the 3rd Sikh Infantry. Although it carried a Sikh name, it was not completely Sikh in its composition. Like the other three Sikh regiments, it had 50 per cent Punjabi Muslims from Jhelum and Rawalpindi, Pathans from across the Indus, Dogras from the Shivalaks and Hindoostanees (Poorbias) from the other side of the Jamuna. It was among the last named Hindoostanee sepoys of the 3rd Sikh Infantry (and not among the Sikhs, the Punjabi Musalmans or the Dogras) that the plot to murder British officers was discovered. To quote from the regimental history :

> In July it came to the notice of the Commanding Officer that some of the Hindoostanees had been talking in a very mutinous and

> insubordinate manner regarding the disturbances in Hindoostan, and all efforts failing to discover the ring leaders, he determined to disarm the whole, which was accordingly done ...They consisted of 4 native officers, 12 Havildars, 26 Naiks, 60 Privates [*Historical Records of 3rd Sikhs*, pp. 10-11].

This is supported by the *Punjab Mutiny Report* by R. Montgomery, pp. 67-68, paragraphs 107-08.

Another conspiracy reported at Dera Ismail Khan was amongst the 39th Native Infantry composed exclusively of the Poorbia sepoys who had quietly surrendered their arms.

The argument that 'the democratic press of the various European countries hailed the 1857 uprising as a National revolt of the Indian people' carries no weight with a man of history. It was nothing more than political propaganda of the jealous anti-British European countries against England.

PUNJABIS DID NOT LACK PATRIOTISM

It is true that the Punjabis were not devoid of patriotic fervour. I would be the last man to say that. But what they could not believe was that the Poorbia soldiers, who had been the most devoted henchmen of the British for a hundred years, who had helped the British subjugate the Marathas, the Rajputs, the Jats, the Gurkhas, the Pathans and the Sikhs, and were garrisoning the Punjab for the British even during the Mutiny, could have turned

patriots overnight. Such a movement for which the various martial fraternities of Indian people had not been consulted and taken into confidence, and which was openly denounced by the people of Bengal and Madras, and was not joined by the people of Maharashtra, Bombay, Gujrat, Sindh, and Rajasthan, could not, according to the Punjabis, be a national movement. The Poorbias alone did not constitute the Indian nation, nor was nationalism the name of whatever they did, whether it was the indiscriminate murder of innocent women and children, the plunder and spoliation of their own countrymen, or secret negotiations with the British to further their personal interests.

HINDU-MUSLIM UNITY LACKING

There is no denying the fact that there was then no understanding between the Hindus and Muslims. It is true that the majority of the Poorbia soldiers were high-caste Hindus and they sought shelter under the banner of the Mughal emperor who was raised to throne. The emperor was practically a helpless puppet in the hands of his sons and of Muslim lieutenants, who had all the power and authority in their own hands. The efforts at Hindu-Muslim unity were mostly one-way traffic. Having broken with the government, and not supported by either Hindu Rajput, Maratha, Dogra and Gurkha princes or the people, the Hindu sepoys were left with no alternative other than following the Muslim leaders who saw in the success of the mutiny the

revival of Muslim rule in the country. Emperor Bahadur Shah favoured them with the prohibition of cow-slaughter in Delhi on the occasion of Id, and Khan Bahadur Khan of Bareilly also offered to prohibit cow-killing not for Hindu-Muslim unity or for respect for Hindu sentiments, but only as a bargain, for killing Englishmen. 'If the Hindus will come forward to slay the English', said he, 'the Mohammedans will from that very day put a stop to the slaughter of cows' [SNS, 93]. This needs no comments.

MUSLIM FANATICISM

The unfurling of the Green Flag of holy *jihad* and the plunder and massacre of Hindus in Delhi, Bareilly, Bijnor, Moradabad and other places were certainly not the symbols of Hindu-Muslim unity. Nor was the Muslim attempt to hoist the Green Flag on the Hindu temple of Bisheshwar at Benaras the result of friendly regard for the Hindus.

'The communal hatred', says Dr. Majumdar, 'led to ugly communal riots in many parts of U.P. The Green Flag was hoisted and bloody wars were fought between Hindus and Muslims in Bareilly, Bijnor, Moradabad and other places where the Muslims shouted for the revival of Muslim kingdom' [pp. 230-31].

On the authority of the *Bidrohe Bengali* of Durgadas Bandyopadhyaya, an eye-witness, Dr. Majumdar tells us : 'the demon of communalism

also raised its head. The Muslims spat over the Hindus and openly defiled their houses by sprinkling them with cows' blood and placing cows' bones within the compounds. Concrete instances are given where Hindu sepoys came into clash with Muslim hooligans and a complete riot ensued. The Hindus oppressed by the Muslims were depressed at the success of the mutiny and daily offered prayers to God for the return of the English' [RCM, 177].

This was the foretaste of the feared revival of Muslim rule. One shudders to think of what would have actually followed it.

In spite of this all, if some people wish to live in a state of hallucination and believe that there was a complete friendly understanding and great communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus at all stages in the Mutiny, they are most welcome to do so, but they should not expect a student of history to be one with them. Past history has to be recorded as it was and not as we wish it to be presented a century afterwards. It cannot be written to order, or moulded and remoulded according to changing times.

MUTINEERS WORSE THAN PLUNDERERS

That the mutineers behaved worse than bands of plunderers and professional dacoits is proved by a large number of petitions submitted to Emperor Bahadur Shah, and his instructions and orders issued

thereon to the military and police authorities. According to the evidence on record, the mutineers took the law into their own hands and helped themselves with whatever they wished to take away. The bad examples set by the Mughal princes and rebel leaders encouraged the soldiers to enter any house in and outside the city of Delhi and billet themselves on whomsoever they liked. There is nothing on record to support the argument advanced to defend or to explain away the conduct of the mutineers that 'the rebels harmed only those [Indians] who either refused to give supplies to them or were suspected of being in league with the British'.

The Emperor forwarded the petitions of helpless sufferers to Prince Mirza Mughal for affording protection. But finding that his orders were not obeyed, the Emperor wrote to his son, Mirza Mughal, on June 18 : 'It is surprising that, up to the present time no arrangements should have been made... It is the business of the Army to protect, and not to desolate and plunder'. On the 19th June, the residents of Jaisinghpura and Paharganj complained that 'the Troops of the State... oppressing the shopkeepers forcibly take away their wares, without the payment of prices, and also, entering the dwelling houses.... forcibly carry away all such articles... that they can lay hands on, and wound with fire-arms and swords those who may supplicate their forbearance' [TB, 11, 12

In his order of June 27, the Emperor wrote to Princes Mughal and Khair Sultan: 'Not a day has elapsed since the arrival of the army, and its taking up quarters in the city, that petitions from the towns-people have not been submitted, representing the excesses committed by numerous Infantry sepoys... You, our sons, are directed to take all proper steps to prevent the men of the Army from plundering and desolating the City" [TB. 14].

Syed Abdulla, priest of the shrine of Hazrat Sheikh Muhammad Chishti, petitioned on June 29 that 'the whole of the autumnal crop of sugarcane, churee, etc.,... has been totally devastated, and more than this, the very implements of agriculture such as ploughs, woodwork on wells, have all been carried away in plunder by soldiers' [TB. 15].

Similarly, petitions from all types of people, rich and poor, Hindus and Muslims, came in from all quarters of the capital and from towns and rural areas, complaining against the depredations of the mutineers. In his orders to Prince Mughal, the Emperor tells him 'that Troopers of Cavalry come from Jodhpur have picquetted their horses in front of the shops and have taken possession of a number of them', and that the rebel Gujjars of Aliganj, Mallanji, Hasangarh and Alapur 'are now engaged in highway robbery and in plundering the country' [TB. 21, 22].

BAHADUR SHAH DISGUSTED

But who cared for the wishes and orders of

Bahadur Shah, a helpless puppet in the hands of the mutineers ? They only meant to use his name to have their own way. And, when they found that his wishes clashed with their own, they just ignored him. Openly disobeyed and insulted by the mutineers, Emperor Bahadur Shah, in disgust, threatened to abdicate and leave the capital and commit suicide, as is evident from his memorandum of August 9, 1857, addressed to the officers of the Army at Delhi.

He says :

'If you are not disposed to comply with these requests, let me be conveyed, in safety, to the Khwaja Sahib. I shall there sit and employ myself in the occupation of a *mujavir* (sweeper) and, if this even is not acceeded to, I shall relinquish every concern, and go away. Let those who think they can detain me attempt to do so. Not having been killed by the hands of English, I shall be killed by yours. Further, the oppression that is at present inflicted on the people, it is inflicted on me. It is incumbent on you all to take measures to prevent it. Or let me have my answer, and I shall swallow a diamond and kill myself [TB. 35].

Even this had no effect, and there was no improvement in the attitude and conduct of the mutineers. Emperor Bahadur Shah, therefore, resolved to discard the world, to adopt the garb of

a faqir and go to the shrine of Khwaja Kutb-ud-Din and thence proceed to the holy city of Mecca [TB, 39-40]. One can hardly imagine the agony and mental torture to which the helpless Emperor was subjected by the misbehaviour of the mutineers and their leaders.

The following extracts from the order of Bahadur Shah addressed to his son, Mirza Mughal, speak volumes for themselves and leave no ground for any further comments on the point under discussion:

'Repeated injunctions have been issued prohibiting plunder and aggression in the city, but all to no purpose; for although ten days have now elapsed, the same evils are prevailing to the present time... [Regiments of Infantry] have thoroughly desolated several of the bazaars. Moreover without reference to night or day, they enter and plunder the houses of inhabitants on false pleas...They force locks and shop-doors, and they forcibly loose the horses of cavalry and take them off... A notification, under special seal was issued publicly proclaiming that courts of justice had been established in the city, and prohibiting acts of violence on the part of soldiery. Even this had no effect...They now clamorously demand allowances daily, and above all, daily take allowance for more men than are present ...Under these circumstances, how is it to be believed that these people can have the welfare

of the state at heart, or that they cherish and desire to yield subjection and obedience to the royal authority?...Wearied and helpless, we have now resolved on making a vow to pass the remainder of our days in service acceptable to God,...assuming the garb of a religious mendicant to proceed first and stay at the shrine of Saint Khwaja Sahib, and, after making necessary arrangements for the journey, to go eventually to Mecca [TB, 220-223].

Men such as these who would observe no discipline, recognize no authority, and obey no orders, even of the supreme head of the State, and who would indulge in cold-blooded murders of women and children, despoil their own countrymen, and rob their own exchequer by fraud and dishonesty, are a disgrace to any movement, and cannot, in truth, be hailed as champions of a national cause.

BRITISH ATROCITIES

It is being said that 'there is ample evidence to prove that the atrocities committed by the Britishers exceeded those committed by the rebels in all respects'. Admitted. Nobody would justify and acclaim the British atrocities—not even the Britishers. They deserve our strongest condemnation. They were the result of revengeful madness. But the atrocities committed by the Britishers, later, in retaliation, do not justify those committed by the rebels who began the Mutiny with cold-blooded butchery in Meerut and Delhi. And to acclaim and celebrate activities which had no moral or

religious justification is not becoming of a nation with a rich heritage as India has.

It would have been more in the larger interests of the country to have allowed these painful memories to be quietly forgotten. Who does not know that in violent movements and bloody revolutions, the national character of the people not unoften sinks very low. That is why Mahatma Gandhi studiedly avoided the introduction of violence in his movements. And if he were alive, I am sure, he would not have permitted the celebration of the centenary of the Mutiny. I have nothing but pity for those who can, even after a century, extol the blood-thirsty murderers of innocent women and children. For, if murder is the worst of crimes for the purpose of history, those who promote or defend it, before or after, share in proportion the guilt of the crime. May the Lord, in his boundless mercy, give light and guidance to his erring people.

TREACHERY OF RAJA NAHAR SINGH AND RAO TULA RAM

About Raja Nahar Singh and Rao Tula Ram, in whose memory a memorial is being raised in the Punjab for their supposed sacrifice in the Mutiny, the less said the better. They were both playing a double game to secure and further their personal interests. 'These Chiefs', says Dr. Surendranath Sen, 'were supposed to have closely identified them-

selves with the King's cause, but they were secretly negotiating for a settlement with the English, even before the British had succeeded in achieving any notable success against the sepoys' [*Eighteen Fifty-Seven* pp. 91-92].

If memorials are being raised in honour of them, this is being done by politicians and not by historians.

The Sikhs, according to one calculation, formed hardly 10 per cent of the population in the Punjab, at the time of Mutiny, and the remaining 90 per cent of the Punjabis were Hindus and Muslims. If the Sikhs had, for some reasons, kept aloof from the mutineers, why did not the Hindus and Muslims of the Punjab join them? one may ask. The 90 per cent majority could have easily ignored the 10 per cent or brushed them aside. In the all-India calculation, the Sikhs would hardly be 1 per cent, and they could not have successfully opposed the 99 per cent majority of the Hindus and Muslims, if they were all united and there was complete harmony amongst them, as claimed by a writer.

The truth is that not only did the people of the Punjab, the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs kept aloof from the mutineers, but the people of Bengal, Madras, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Sindh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir and the North-Western Frontier Province also did not join them. Some of

them actually opposed them. Not only this. Out of the three Presidency Armies—Bengal, Madras and Bombay—it was only a part of the Bengal Army that had mutinied. The other parts fought on the side of the British Goverment to suppress it. The Madras and Bombay armies remained quiet and loyal. Evidently, the Poorbia soldiers had failed to win the sympathies of thier own class of people in the south and south-west as in the west and north-west.

HOLLOW CRIES

Surely, there was, then, something fundamentally wrong with the Mutiny and its leaders that kept the majority of the Indian people and army away from them.

In the first place, the movement had nothing national or patriotic about it. The idea of India being one nation had yet to grow in the country. The conduct of the mutineers and their leaders in Delhi, Meerut and other places was not such as to convey to others the impression of the mutiny being anything like national or of common interest and benefit.

The cry of *din* and *dharma*, raised by the mutineers and Emperor Bahadur Shah, carried no weight with the people at large. Beyond this, there was no common popular aim to appeal to, and attract, the people.

The past record of the Poorbia soldiers was not creditable enough to win the confidence of the non-Poorbias. Then, there was no plan for the mutiny on an all-India basis. The non-Poorbias had not been consulted, nor invited.

And, lastly, the mutineers failed to produce from among themselves, or win over from amongst the people, sincere and selfless leaders who could command respect and obedience.

There was no mutual understanding between the Hindus and Muslims, and between the various social, economic and geographic fraternities of the country for a joint effort against the British. The exhibition of blood-thirstiness in the murder of women and children sent throughout the country a thrill of horror and hatred against the mutinous sepoys and alienated the sympathies of their probable friends.

All this put together was responsible for the failure of the Mutiny of 1857.

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